

Equine escapes

If you're planning your 2014 getaway, then why not take your horse with you this year? Horse&Rider's Kate Hammaren looks at some of the options



Pack your bags, pack your horse!

The main attraction for bringing your horse on holiday is to take advantage of riding you wouldn't normally have access to

Many horse owners find it hard to say goodbye to their beloved horse before setting off on their holidays. If this sounds familiar, then planning a trip where your horse can go with you might be right up your street.

Whether you want to improve your riding, enjoy some stunning scenery, find somewhere that your non-horsey partner can enjoy, too, or gallop along a beach, there really is something for everyone.

Taking your horse on holiday...

- saves you the cost of paying someone to look after him while you're away.
- means you won't miss him because he'll be there with you.
- gives you a great opportunity to improve your riding and/or explore new places.
- can give you a temporary experience of having your horse at 'home'.
- is often cheaper than going abroad, and you won't necessarily need any spending money!

Where to start

Before you book up, decide what you want from a riding holiday. Do you want tuition? If so, what type? As well as the usual flatwork and jumping-based holiday centres, you may wish to explore a natural horsemanship route or have a go at a new discipline altogether.

If it's scenery and long, relaxing hacks you're striving for, then choose an area of the country you'd like to explore.

"The main attraction for bringing your horse on holiday is to enjoy riding you wouldn't normally have access to," says Hannah Hibbs, who runs Forest Lodge Holidays in Suffolk. "Location is so important when choosing a horsey holiday."

You may want to do a bit of everything, in which case there are plenty of centres that offer a mixture of lessons, beach riding, rides out in the country and much more. There are great beaches all around the country, but you'll need to make sure they are horse friendly at the time of year you plan to go. The centre will be able to advise you on this.

To help you choose somewhere reputable, it's worth asking people on equestrian forums who have been and written reviews or given advice. State exactly what you want to do, and where, and wait to hear back from like-minded horse owners who have tried and tested the centres.



Ask other riders for their holiday suggestions



Katie, Mav and her family enjoy the sands of Wales

The thrill of galloping along a beach is second to none...and a huge 'bucket list' favourite



The wonder of Wales

Ratie Roebuck from Somerset turned her horse holiday into a whole family affair. "When my eldest son, Barney, was about 10 or 11 months old, we stayed in a holiday cottage in the Gower Peninsula in South Wales, very close to Rhossili Bay. My in-laws came, too. "We also took my horse, Mav, who stayed at a nearby stables on grass livery for the week. This was just down the road and ideal. "I went on escorted hacks across the moor and along the beach, and I also put him in the trailer and took him to Rhossili Bay. My husband, Matt, and I would spend an hour galloping up and down the beach having a great time and sometimes, when it wasn't too windy, my mother and father-in-law would bring Barney down to watch! "It was a lovely holiday where we all spent good, fun times together. Matt even had time for a surf and I had a great time with all of my family – both two-legged and four!"

Must-have items

- If you're wondering what to pack, here are some ideas:
- Clothing for all weathers. The UK is unpredictable at the best of times, so go prepared for any conditions, whatever the forecast might tell you.
 - Your hard hat, body protector or air vest and fluorescent or reflective gear if you're planning on riding out.
 - Your horse's passport. This is a legal requirement for travelling and you must be able to produce it at any time.
 - A first-aid kit for you and your horse.
 - Spare items of tack, such as a spare bridle, stirrups and girth, just in case anything breaks.
 - Suncream. It's easy to get burnt without realising on long hacks, even if it doesn't appear to be particularly sunny.
 - A logbook, if you are having lessons. This allows you to keep notes about what you have learnt in your sessions, so you can continue the good work once you get home.
 - A camera or video camera. Many smartphones are good enough to do the job well these days.
 - Some good books or DVDs for night-time entertainment.
 - Ordnance Survey map of the local area, although some centres will provide these. Check before you leave.



"Choosing a centre that's BHS approved sets a good standard," says Hannah. "If you're seeking advice, ask people whether there was a relaxed atmosphere on arrival, and whether the centre was calm and organised. This makes for a great start to your holiday and, in my experience, horse owners really appreciate this." And of course, you'll need to consider accommodation. If your horsebox has all the mod cons, you might be comfortable sleeping there. If not, there's everything from camping under canvas and standard B&B rooms, to caravans or luxury log cabins. "Whether you choose self-catering or B&B, you want clean, comfortable accommodation for both you and your horse," adds Hannah. Look for 'Horses Welcome' establishments for extra peace of mind.

Life's a beach

The thrill of galloping along a beach is second to none for many riders and is a huge 'bucket list' favourite. Before booking, ensure you and your horse are both capable of riding on a beach, as

the wide, open space can give some horses a new lease of life. Check with the centre you choose that the beaches are sandy and not pebbly, and find out whether there are any restrictions about when you can and can't ride on them.

As well as enjoying a gallop, you may be able to remove your saddle and go for a horseback dip – or even a swim – in the sea. Or why not make the most of the firmer sand and practise some of your school movements?

While riding on the beach can be great fun, the novelty may wear off after a day or two, so unless it's a weekend vacation, it may be worth checking that there are other places to ride, too.

Working holiday

It might not be everyone's idea of a great riding holiday, but more studious riders may wish to head off into the hands of a top trainer, or book onto a course and gain a qualification. Large equestrian centres, such as the Yorkshire Riding Centre or Talland Equitation in Gloucestershire, offer tailor-made training holidays where you can

brush up on your flatwork or jumping skills.

If you're looking for something a bit different, then you could book onto a natural horsemanship course or something even more specialist, such as rider biomechanics or equine behaviour courses. Brandy House Farm in Wales offers courses on animal learning, rider biomechanics and Parelli techniques, as well as the chance to ride out and take in the stunning scenery.

The scenic route

Everyone has a different idea about what kind of scenery they like the most and there's also your horse to consider when choosing where to go. If he's fit and sure-footed, then undulating ground or hill work might not be a problem. However, if your usual riding country is flat, it's not really fair to expect your horse to cope with steep climbs several days in a row.

The east of England offers plenty of flat, but scenic riding country, while Wales or further north is more likely to be hilly. Heading to the West Country could offer you the best of both worlds.

Something for everyone

If you're taking a non-horsey friend or partner – or even the whole family – then you might want to look at what else is on offer. Choosing somewhere near towns where your holiday partners can go off exploring or shopping is something to bear in mind, but often the centres have other activities on-site to keep everyone entertained.

"In our experience, non-horsey guests like to relax in our hot tubs or take advantage of the mountain bike routes, hiking and canoeing facilities," Hannah explains. "This is something you can discuss beforehand so that everyone knows exactly what they want from the holiday before you head off."

There is so much else on offer, so if you're trying to sell the idea to a not-so-keen other half, suggestions of nearby golf courses, jet skiing, kayaking, surfing or an on-site gym might just do the trick.

Right: More studious riders may wish to book some top training

For more horse-friendly holidays, visit...

- forestlodgeholidays.co.uk
- talland.net
- yrc.co.uk
- brandyhousefarm.co.uk
- wellington-riding.com
- collacott.co.uk
- churchfarm.uk.net



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